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ABSTRACT

The primary concern of this paper is intra-audience feedback. It reports the results of an experimental study designed to assess the effect of audience response on observers' judgements of a communicator's speaking ability and credibility. Differences in observers' attitudes as a function of audience response was also assessed. The experimenters employed a 2 X 3 factorial design--a factor of observer ego involvement including two levels (high and low) and an audience response factor with three levels (positive, negative, and neutral). The same basic design was used for all criterion measures: speech rating, credibility, and attitude change. Audiences of five members were selected from speech courses at Washington State University and trained to exhibit positive, negative, and neutral nonverbal feedback at predetermined points to the selected speech. Video-tapes were made of the three separate feedback sessions and the communicator tape made in an empty room was superimposed upon the audience tapes. Ten observers, also Washington State students, then responded to each of the completed tapes. No significant differences were obtained for any comparisons. The artificiality of the experimental conditions was considered to be the most likely cause. (Author/LG)

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A STUDY OF INTRA-AUDIENCE FEEDBACK EFFECTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the results of an experimental study into intra-audience feedback effects. The opening pages review the general literature in feedback. The section ends by contrasting Hylton's (1971) approach to the study of intra-audience feedback effects (referred to as observable audience response in Hylton's study) with the present approach.

The purpose of the investigation was to assess the effect of audience response on observers' judgments of a communicator's speaking ability and credibility. Differences in observers' attitudes as a function of audience response was also assessed.

A 2x3 factorial design was employed, the audience response factor consisted of three levels (positive, negative, and neutral). The factor of observer ego involvement included two levels (high and low). The same basic design was used for all criterion measures (speech rating, credibility, and attitude change).

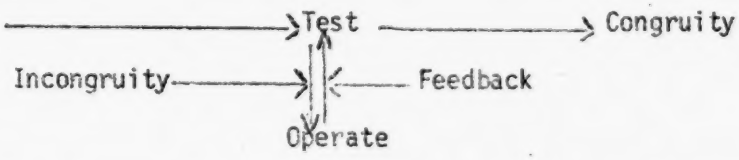
No significant differences were obtained for any comparisons.

The artificiality introduced by the experimental conditions was considered to be the most likely cause. However, it was felt that such a total denial of the theoretical construct could not be ignored. That is the major difference between Hylton's study and the present one was the amount of control used in the investigations. Hylton utilizing a "realistic" (i.e. as close to the live setting as possible) approach found significant relationships. The present study using a more controlled laboratory approach did not. The paramount question is, did the control allow us to see that the phenomena does not exist or did it reduce the strength of the phenomena to undectable proportions. Further research should be directed toward verifying the artificiality hypothesis.

A STUDY OF INTRA-AUDIENCE FEEDBACK EFFECTS[1]

In recent years, communication scholars have begun to realize the vital role feedback plays in the communication process [see for example Wisdom (1951); Tustin (1966); Miller, Galanter and Pribam (1960); Powers, Clark and McFarland (1966); and Van Riper and Irwin (1958)]. The essence of the feedback notion is presented in the following definition: ". . . feedback (is) the property of being able to adjust future conduct by past performance. Feedback may be as simple as that of the common reflex or it may be a higher order feedback, in which past experience is used not only to regulate specific movements, but also whole policies of behavior (Weiner, 1954, p. 33)."

Miller, et.al. (1960) present an action theory that includes feedback as one of its basic tenets. Their unit is called "Tote" for test-operate-test-exit. A version adapted from page 26 of Miller, et. al., follows:



Some perceived incongruity in the world was discovered by testing - one operates to eliminate the incongruity. Feedback is used to determine whether the incongruity still exists. In the essence, this comparing and contrasting function is the basic element of the feedback notion.

Conceptually, this approach calls for feedback to be analyzed as a loop phenomena. Feedback represents the production and reception of messages and the subsequent reception of the perceived effect by the sender. Generally speaking,

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[1]The above study was in part supported by the Social Research Center of Washington State University.

it is difficult if not impossible to investigate all aspects of the loop in a single study. Consequently, investigations of feedback phenomena can be categorized by placing them into groups on the basis of which section of the loop was being investigated (investigations of the effect of receivers' feedback on a sender, the effect of receivers' feedback on other receivers, and senders' judgmental accuracy of receivers' internal states).

The present study also investigated only one aspect of the loop.[2] The primary concern was intra-audience feedback (the effect receivers' responses to a sender have on other receivers' responses). A few studies have focused on this aspect of the feedback loop. These studies found positive feedback seemed to be a strong intra-audience stimulus (Hylton, 1968). Those persuaded perceived the general audience attitude as more favorable than those not persuaded (Sawyer, 1955). Shapiro (1960) did not find this effect. Traver (1941) found individuals tended to over-estimate agreement and under-estimate disagreement of other audience members. Wallen (1943) found estimates of audience members' attitudes to be highly correlated with the opinion of the estimator. The effect a group's judgment has on an individual's perception has been demonstrated by Sherif (1935), Asch (1958), and others (for example Deutsch and Gerard, 1957; Converse and Campbell, 1968). Their findings indicate a given group member will typically distort (through lying, actual belief change, or ignoring the discrepancy) perception of physical stimuli (line length, etc.) when confronted with a unanimous group decision. These studies have not generally been concerned with receivers' evaluations of communication.

However, one study (Hylton, 1971) was particularly relevant to this investigation. Hylton was concerned with measuring intra-audience feedback effects

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[2]For a detailed discussion of studies relevant to the other two aspects of the loop see Ayres (1971) and Gardiner (1971).

in a live setting (he labeled this observable audience response). In essence, he found that attitude change and credibility estimates by naive observers were influenced by the feedback produced by confederates. The positive feedback condition induced higher credibility estimates and more attitude change than the negative condition.

As Hylton points out "...this study used a live speaker, and sought to justify such use on the grounds of its centrality to the feedback concept, a replication is needed to test the results when a speaker's delivery is held constant (pp. 263-264)." Along with speaker delivery, there were other aspects of Hylton's study in which more control might have been desirable. He asked cohorts to respond in a manner that represented the desired condition (i.e. positively, negatively, or free). Some question remains as to whether their responses were perceived as being positive (or whatever) by other receivers. Present evidence indicates little support for speakers' abilities to accurately interpret audience reaction (see Ayres, 1971). Only two studies known to the authors have uncovered such abilities (Ayres, 1970; Dickens and Kruger, 1970). With so little supporting evidence, it would seem desirable to run some validation procedures in order to determine whether the conditions were perceived as positive, negative and free respectively.

The criterion measures used by Hylton were also somewhat questionable in light of recent discussions. Hylton utilized McCroskey's scales for speaker authoritativeness and character; and Berlo, Lemert, and Mertz's scales for dynamism to assess credibility. The attitude scales were also obtained from previous McCroskey investigations. A number of authors (see for example Tucker, 1971; Darnell, 1970) have discussed difficulties with this procedure. The problems stem from three sources: -- concept - scale interactions, concept - population

interactions, and situation - concept interactions. The essential question is whether a given set of scales developed for a given concept in a given situation can be utilized in another situation with another group of subjects. The argument is as yet unsettled. It seems risky, however, to utilize semantic differential scales developed by others.

The present study attempted to control the above sources of variation. Consequently, although concerned with the identical conceptual issue as Hylton, a considerably different approach was used.

Purpose. The purpose of the investigation was to assess the effect of audience response on observers' judgments of a communicator's speaking ability and credibility. Differences in observers' attitudes as a function of audience response was also assessed.

Rationale. Speaking ability, credibility, and attitude dimensions were chosen as the most likely aspects of the communication process to be affected by intra-audience feedback. It was felt observers' judgments of speakers ability might be affected by the manner in which the audience is responding. Persons rating speakers have typically focused on the speaker's behavior and assumed their estimate was a fairly pure assessment of the speaker's ability. Audience reaction, although considered an aspect of the process, is generally not given much import in the assessment process. The central issue is whether observers' assessments are colored by the nature of the audience response he is exposed to. In light of the results found by Asch and others reported earlier, it seems logical that assessments of speaking ability would be affected by audience reaction.[3]

Attitude and credibility measures were included for similar reasons. Additionally, these were dimensions found to be of importance by Hylton.

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[3]Incidentally, a similar rationale could be developed for reporters and others.

HYPOTHESES

Speaking Ability. An audience condition factor will produce a significant main effect (positive > neutral > negative).

An ego involvement factor will produce a significant main effect (low ego involved s's will rate the speaker higher than high ego involved s's).

There will be no significant interaction effects.

Credibility. An audience condition factor will produce a significant main effect (positive > neutral > negative).

An ego involvement factor will produce a significant main effect (low ego involved observers will perceive the speaker to be more credible than high ego involved observers).

There will be no significant interaction effects.

Attitude. An audience condition factor will produce a significant main effect (positive > neutral > negative).

An ego involvement factor will not produce a significant main effect.

There will be significant interaction effects (e.g. lowly ego involved observers exposed to the positive audience condition will report a higher positive attitude than highly ego involved subjects; the reverse should be true for the negative condition).

Definitions. The following definitions were used in this study:

Positive Audience Condition: A group of five people who reacted favorably (head nodding, smiling, etc.[4]) to a message.

Negative Audience Condition: A group of five people who reacted unfavorably (head shaking, frowning, etc.) to a message.

Neutral Audience Condition: A group of five people who didn't exhibit any of the positive or negative behaviors.

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[4]For a complete list of the positive and negative behaviors referred to in this section see Blubaugh (1969).

Ego involvement was operationally defined as the number of categories a subject used in sorting statements about advertising (three or fewer equaled high ego involvement; six or more equaled low ego involvement).

Speaker ability was operationally defined as the rating an observer assigned the communicator on a Knower Performance Scale.

Credibility was operationally defined as the response an observer reported for the speaker on a set of semantic differential type credibility scales.

Attitude was operationally defined as the response an observer gave to a set of semantic differential scales.[5]

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[5]The procedures used in generating the credibility and attitude scales are reported in the next section of the paper.

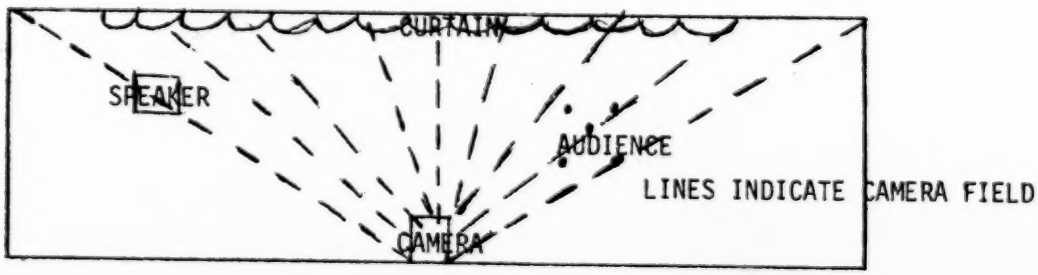
PROCEDURE

Message and Communicator. A five minute message on the topic of advertising was written by the experimenters. A male communicator, recommended by the forensics director at Washington State University, presented the message. The message presentation was video-taped. Since the investigation focused on the effect of audience response on observers' judgments, the quality of the presentation was considered to be relatively immaterial. The major concern was that the message presentation remain constant for each of the audience conditions. Video-taping guaranteed the constancy of the message presentation.

Audience Conditions. Five audience members were selected from Speech 101 fall semester at Washington State University. Audience members were trained to exhibit positive, negative, and neutral nonverbal feedback at predetermined points to the selected speech. These behaviors were taken in toto from an investigation (Blubaugh, 1969) which validated the classification of these behaviors.

Specifically, the audiences were shown the video-taped speech three times. They responded positively during the first presentation, negatively during the second, and neutrally during the third. Their reactions were video-taped each time.

Considerable care was taken in the audience and message taping sessions. The speech was delivered in the same room that the audiences were taped in. A single camera was utilized. The camera was placed in a stationary position on the side of the room. The camera field was large enough to include both the audience and speaker. Perhaps the following diagram will be useful:



The speaker stood in the speaker location and presented the speech to an empty room while being video-taped. A television monitor was then placed at the speaker location. The midpoint of the screen was placed at the same height as the speaker's head. The audience members then took their assigned seats (the audience members retained the same seats for all conditions). The audience video-taping then proceeded as described above.

The obtained audience tapes were then played for 10 observers. These observers were asked to rank order the tapes on a favorableness dimension. That is, the observers were asked to rank the tape that revealed the most positive reaction 1, the next most positive reaction 2, and so on. The order of the presentation of tapes was randomly determined. All ten observers ranked the positive audience condition tape 1, neutral 2, and negative 3. This was considered sufficient justification to deem the tapes at least differed in the degree of favorableness. Of course, this doesn't guarantee the tapes were positive, neutral and negative. However, this result coupled with the validation performed by Blubaugh seemed sufficient justification to deem the audience conditions representative of positive, negative and neutral response.

Video-tape Construction. The communicator was superimposed on the audience tapes via a split screen and staging procedure performed by the Washington State University audio-visual department. The result was three video-tapes constructed to appear as live recordings. In this way, communicator behavior remained constant while audience behavior was manipulated.

In order to be assured that the tapes appeared realistic, a pilot study was conducted. Three sets of five students viewed each tape (each group viewed a different tape) and commented about its quality. Specifically, they responded to ten Likert type scales. Only an authenticity scale was of concern in this portion of the study. Our criterion was that if one or

more of the five observers indicated the tape was not authentic in any degree that that tape would have to be redone and all tapes retested. In order to achieve this criterion level, the procedure was repeated three times.

Observers. Observers were students enrolled in Speech 112 Spring Semester at Washington State University. This is a freshman level course and provided a pool of around 700 subjects. These subjects were stratified according to ego involvement (high or low) and randomly assigned to observe one of the three reconstructed video-tapes.

Specifically, during the second week of spring semester, all students enrolled in Speech 112 were instructed to do an own categories ego-involvement sort on the topic of advertising. Ninety students who were highly ego-involved and ninety students who were lowly ego-involved were then randomly selected from all those who met the high and low ego-involvement criteria established earlier. During the twelfth week of the semester, these students were exposed to one of the three audience condition tapes.

Incidentally, the ego involvement variable was included since a previous investigation (Ayres, 1970) indicated the importance of this variable in assessing attitude in a similar feedback situation. In general, he found that high ego-involved audience members' attitudes and degree of ego involvement were more accurately assessed by observers than those same items in low ego-involved audience members. Since the involvement level of audience members was so obvious in that study, it seemed the degree of an observer's ego involvement might explain some variance in observer assessments.

Data Collection. Observers were shown the reconstructed tapes. They were then asked to complete a Knower Performance Scale, an attitude scale, and a set of credibility scales. These judgments served as the criterion

measures in this study.

Measures. Observers' assessments of communicator behavior were recorded on Knower Performance Scales (see appendix A). The criterion measure consisted of the total numerical rating. No reliability or validity routines were performed on the Knower instrument.

The attitude scales were constructed the previous semester using 200 students enrolled in Speech 112. Specifically, students were asked to fill out a set of semantic differential scales for the topic of advertising. The bipolar scales were 76 scales used by Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1956, p. 53-61). The resulting data was submitted to a principal-axis factor analysis with varimax rotation. Two factors emerged that accounted 15 percent of the total variance and 56 percent of the common variance. The factors were labeled evaluative and potency since many of the scales loading highly on the factors were scales that loaded highly on those factors in Osgood, et. al.'s, original investigation.

The credibility scales were generated in similar manner. Essentially, Berlo, Lemert, and Mertz's (1970) procedure was followed. Their scales and instructions were presented to 200 subjects (Speech 112 students at Washington State University). A principal-axis factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed. Two factors emerged that accounted for 82 percent of the common variance and 70 percent of the total variance. The first factor was labeled trustworthiness which contained elements of the factors Berlo, et. al., labeled safety and qualification. Interestingly, almost the identical scales that loaded separately on Berlo, et. al.'s two factors loaded on one fact in this study. The second factor was clearly the same as Berlo, et. al.'s dynamism factor.

For both credibility and attitude, the five scales that had the highest factor purity scores were included in the test instrument.

Factor purity scores were determined by subtracting all factor loadings of a scale from the loading of the scale on a given factor. The result was one attitude and one credibility instrument each containing 10 scales and two factors (see appendix B).

DESIGN AND STATISTICAL TREATMENT

A 2x3 factorial design was employed. The audience response factor consisted of three levels (positive, negative, and neutral). The factor of observer ego involvement included two levels (high and low). This design may be graphically represented as follows:

Factors

Levels

Ego Involvement

high low

Feedback positive negative neutral positive negative neutral

The same design was utilized for all three criterion measures (speech rating, attitude, and credibility).

The data was analyzed via a two day fixed effects analysis of variance with attenuate F tests. In all cases (speech rating, attitude, and credibility), a summative model was used. The overall speech rating total for each factor was used. The points on the semantic scales were assigned numbers (1 through 7). The subjects responses were converted to numbers and the results totaled for each factor.

RESULTS

Generally the results section of a study of this nature consumes a considerable amount of space due to the systematic reporting of results for each specific hypothesis. The results in this case are so uniform we will not bore you with the specifics. No significant differences were obtained for any comparisons. In no case did any F value approach

significance. The highest obtained $F_{2 \& 123df}$ was 1.57 while the F required for significance at .05 with 2 & 123 df = 2.99.

DISCUSSION

Although one is generally dismayed by non-significant results, several interesting questions arise. The essence of these questions concerns whether the control introduced in this study helped or hampered the study of intra-audience feedback effects. It is possible the control introduced in this study reduced the strength of the phenomena to undectable proportions. On the other hand, it could be the control allowed us to see that the phenomena does not exist in sufficient strength to be an important factor.

The essential difference between Hylton's study (1971) and this study was the amount of control introduced. This study attempted to control audience, speaker, message, and instrument variability, more so than Hylton did.

There certainly is no way to solve this problem in the present discussion. The author is inclined to believe Hylton's results at the present. This could be due to the fact that one's favorite hypotheses die hard. Seriously, though, the theoretical construct and the amount of supporting evidence cannot be dislodged by one disconfirmation. The logical next step is to design a study to assess the effect of the controls. Ideally, the study would control as rigidly as possible all factors not directly perceivable by the experimental subjects (speech, instrument, and cohort response variables).

Another plausible explanation could be that the speech on advertising was not sufficiently persuasive to cause attitude change. However, one would expect persuasiveness of the speech to be less important in

affecting the assessment of speaking ability and credibility variables Perhaps, a non-persuasive speech might even be helpful in revealing intra-audience effects in these areas. If a person is less involved in the speech,he may pay more attention to how others are responding. Of course in this case, the person had only the others on the screen to attend to (again back to the artificiality explanation).

The attitude measure was also less than desirable. If you will recall, the two factors used only accounted for 15 percent of the total variance in the factor analysis. In order to account for more variance (say 25 percent), one would have had to include another four factors. This could mean that advertising does not tap a significant attitude structure. If one is interested in generating effects, one should deal with significant concerns for people. A future study should use a topic less diffuse than advertising.

Another explanation revolves around the procedure used in this study. You will recall that these subjects were asked to rate speaking ability as well as fill out attitude and credibility scales. It could be that the observers focused so much on the rating task that effects due to the independent variables were eliminated. However, the information given to the students before the presentation of the message don't seem to be that directive. Specifically, the people were thanked for coming and then told: "What we are going to do is show you a video tape of a speech. After you have viewed the speech, you will be asked to fill out a set of rating forms." Since these were speech students, they could well have concentrated on the possibility of having to rate the speaker. Although, it doesn't seem highly probable, it is certainly another possible explanation for the non-significant results obtained.

In conclusion, no significant relationships were found in this investigation. The artificiality introduced by the experimental conditions was considered the most likely cause. Consequently, the general construct was felt to still be in tact. However, there seems to be little question that such a total denial should not be ignored. Further research should be directed toward verifying the notion that artificiality was the reason non-significant results were obtained. Such a study is presently being conducted by one of the present authors.

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APPENDIX A:

KNOWER PERFORMANCE SCALE

Name_____ Date_____

Criteria	Rating 1-9*	Comments
1. General Effectiveness:		
2. Speech attitudes and adjustments: Enthusiastic____ Communicative____ Poised____ Forceful____ Alert____ Adaptive____		
3. Voice: Easily audible____ Pleasant quality____ Not forced____ Fluent____ Good rate____ Varied____ Good pitch____ Conversational____		
4. Articulation: Clear____ Acceptable____		
5. Physical activity: Direct____ Responsive____ Well controlled____ Adaptive____		
6. Language: Acceptable____ Vigorous____ Precise____ Varied____ Vivid____ Unified____		
7. Ideas: Acceptable purpose____ Clear____ Clear central idea____ Interesting____ Well supported____ Creative____ Well developed____ Significant____ Accurate____		
8. Organization: Well introduced____ Well arranged____ Well divided____ Well concluded____ Clear transitions____		
TOTAL		

*Rate the speaker in each square by using a scale of 1 to 9 for each of the numbered items. Rate him 1, 2, or 3 to indicate various degrees of

deficiency in use of the process; rate him 4, 5, or 6 if he is slightly below average in the process; and rate him 7, 8, or 9 to indicate relative degrees of skill in his use of the process. Add ratings to get total score.

APPENDIX B:

SEMANTIC DIFFERENTIAL INSTRUCTIONS, ATTITUDE SCALES, AND CREDIBILITY SCALES

INSTRUCTIONS

In filling out this form, please make your judgments on the basis of what the concept printed in capital letters means to you. The concept is followed by a set of scales. You are to rate the concept on each of these scales in order.

If you feel that the concept is very closely related to one end of the scale, you should place your check-mark as follows:

fair __X__:____:____:____:____:____:____ unfair

or

fair ____:____:____:____:____:____:__X__ unfair

If you feel that the concept is quite closely related to one on the other end of the scale (but not extremely), you should place your check-mark as follows:

strong ____:__X__:____:____:____:____:____ weak

or

strong ____:____:____:____:____:__X__:____ weak

If the concept seems only slightly related to one side as opposed to the other side (but is not really neutral), then you should check just to the side of the middle space in the appropriate direction. The direction toward which you check, of course, depends upon which of the two ends of the scale seem most characteristic of the thing you are judging.

If you consider the concept to be neutral on the scale, both sides of the scale equally associated with the concept, or if the scale is completely irrelevant, unrelated to the concept, then you should place your check-mark in the middle space.

IMPORTANT: (1) Place your check-marks in the middle of spaces, not on the boundaries.

(2) Be sure you check every scale for the concepts. Do not omit any.

(3) Never put more than one check-mark on a single scale.

Please do not look back and forth through the items. Make each item a separate and independent judgment. Work at fairly high speed through the form. Do not worry or puzzle over individual items. It is your first impressions, the immediate "feelings" about the items, that we want. On the other hand, please do not be careless.

Please turn the page and begin.

ADVERTISING

	strongly related	closely related	slightly related	not related	slightly related	closely related	strongly related	
pleasurable	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	painful
tasteless	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	savory
refreshed	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	weary
bland	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	pungent
sensitive	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	insensitive
humble	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	proud
cooperative	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	competitive
defensive	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	aggressive
fast	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	slow
unintentional	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	intentional

THE PERSON WHO JUST DELIVERED THE SPEECH

kind	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	cruel
dangerous	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	safe
thoughtful	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	thoughtless
unbelievable	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	believable
unselfish	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	selfish
unjust	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	just
bold	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	timid
extroverted	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	introverted
passive	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	active
meek	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	aggressive